

Talks by John Porter

Crosse Connections – three talks	
<p>Andrew Crosse lived at Fyne Court, Broomfield, near Taunton, in the first half of the 19th century. He was an early worker in the new science of electricity and his experiments made him famous in his own time. Locally he was nicknamed the “Wizard of the Quantocks” or the “Thunder and Lightning Man”, but he was well known and respected in the scientific circles of the day.</p> <p>I am Andrew Crosse’s third cousin, five times removed. I have been fascinated with Andrew and his family for years and have spent many hours researching my “Crosse Connections.”</p>	
Crosse Connections I	The first talk introduces you to Andrew Crosse himself, and also two other members of this fascinating family, Andrew’s maternal uncles Thomas and Jasper Porter. Both of them achieved a certain amount of fame and fortune, but in very different ways. Thomas achieved the height of respectability and financial success, while elder brother Jasper fell out with his father and carried his grudge to the grave and beyond!
Crosse Connections II	The second talk introduces further members of the Crosse and Porter families. Their stories include a scandalous connection with Byron’s daughter Ada, Countess of Lovelace, an early introduction of the decimal system in Somerset, and an elopement that hit the headlines in the national press.
Crosse Connections III	The third talk tells how the Crosse family home, Fyne Court, was destroyed by fire, and also introduces a few more family members. One of Andrew Crosse’s sons visited Transylvania and wrote a book about his experiences. A grand-daughter abandoned English society life, and her two young children, to travel and write. And what is the connection between one of Italy’s best-selling novelists and the Crosse family of Fyne Court, Somerset?
Discovering Yoï	<p>In the third of the Crosse Connections talks detailed above I briefly give a little of the life of Edith Cornelia Crosse (1877-1944), who was always known as Yoï (pronounced Yo-ee). For several years after first coming across her I spent hours researching her fascinating life, and more recently in writing her biography. She was a writer, and at various times she lived in Hungary, South Africa, South Wales, London, Rome and Florence. The people she met included Mussolini, her friends and acquaintances included D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley, and her life was not without the occasional scandal!</p> <p>This talk tells her story, but in parallel it also tells how I researched her life.</p>

Each talk lasts about 50 minutes and is fully illustrated.

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Other talks	
Ten Years in Television 1963 – 73	<p>For ten years between September 1963 and 1973, I worked in commercial television as an engineer. This is an account of my experiences, the people I met, and the programmes I worked on, illustrated with clips from some of the programmes.</p> <p>Television has changed immensely over the intervening 40 or so years – this is a record of a vanished age.</p>
Charles Palmer's Log Book 1867	<p>Towards the end of 2010 a document was found in a house in Staplegrove, Taunton, which after some research proved to be an account of a journey to New Zealand and back, written by Charles Palmer, an inn keeper from Brighton. He made the trip to visit two of his sons who had emigrated some eight years earlier. It is a rare record of a journey by someone who travelled second class, and includes fascinating details of his experiences on board ship, as well as life in New Zealand in the second half of the nineteenth century.</p>
British Canals – a Pictorial (and Personal) Story.	<p>When in 1965 I moved to Hemel Hempstead, in Hertfordshire, close to the Grand Union Canal, there was still some commercial traffic on the canal – coal for the nearby paper mills, and lime juice for Rose's bottling plant at St Albans. I became very interested, and over the next 20 years or so I gradually explored much of the British canal system on foot, in the car, on boats, in the mud, in the pubs, and built up a sizeable collection of photographs. This talk draws on that collection to tell the story of British Canals.</p>
60 years with a Camera – a Personal History in Pictures	<p>I started taking photographs in about 1953 with a borrowed camera, and bought my own in 1955. I've been taking photographs ever since, and the collection now amounts to over 10,000 pictures. This talk shows a selection of these pictures, and in doing so illustrates how some aspects of life have changed over the years, while others have remained the same.</p>
Pearl and Alfonso	<p>Pearl Smiddy was the daughter of Ireland's first ever diplomatic representative in the United States. Alfonso de los Reyes was a military attaché at the Spanish Embassy in Washington. Their stories take place against a turbulent political background – of Irish independence and then the events leading up to the Spanish Civil War.</p> <p>In later life Pearl retired to Somerset, where she lived for many years in Combe St. Nicholas, near Chard. She died aged 100 in 2003.</p>

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